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Budget Digest

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THE CHIEF RESPONSIBILITY OF THE BUDGET COMMITTEE

In 1974, Congress reinforced its constitutional authority over federal spending decisions with the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act. Among other provisions, the law established the House and Senate Budget Committees, the two committees solely responsible for drafting a budget resolution (also referred to as the budget).¹

The Unique Role of the Budget Committee. Drafting a budget is the chief responsibility of the Budget Committee and critical to Congress maintaining its “power of the purse.” The budget sets the policy agenda for lawmakers, providing a roadmap for 1) considering spending and tax legislation and 2) addressing our nation’s fiscal challenges. It is also the only document that captures our nation’s entire fiscal picture, including all mandatory and discretionary expenditures, revenues, and debt. While the budget is not signed into law by the President, it is still an enforceable and binding agreement by which both chambers of Congress must abide.

The main components of the budget include:²

- Total aggregate levels of spending and revenue for appropriations bills and authorizing bills over the budget window (typically 10 years);
- Spending targets for each budget functional category;
- Target levels for deficits or surpluses and debt;
- Reconciliation instructions;
- Budget enforcement provisions and spending allocations for committees; and
- Illustrative policy options for how committees can reach the targets outlined in the budget resolution.

Doing Our Work. Drafting a budget is about setting priorities, allocating resources, and making tough choices. A failure to do so is a failure to govern, especially at a time when our nation’s debt has exceeded \$22 trillion and our deficits are nearing \$1 trillion. President Reagan’s chief economic advisor called our nation’s grim fiscal reality “the most dangerous domestic problem facing America’s federal government,” putting the future of our national security and economic prosperity at risk.³ The Budget Committee has a legal and moral obligation to outline a plan that addresses these challenges and puts our country back on a fiscally sustainable path. While the budget process is in need of reform, it should not deter the Budget Committee from doing its work and producing a document that helps lawmakers understand all aspects of the budget and how it affects the American people.⁴

The Budget Committees were authorized to draft the concurrent resolution on the budget. Unlike the authorizing and appropriating committees, which focus on individual Federal programs, the Budget Committees focus on the Federal budget as a whole and on how it affects the national economy.

- House Practice Manual

The Act gives the committees three major assignments:

- (1) to **report the concurrent resolutions on the budget each year, and reconciliation bills** when appropriate
- (2) to study the effects of existing and proposed legislation on the budget, and
- (3) to oversee the operations of the Congressional Budget Office.

- Riddick’s Senate Procedure



¹ <https://www.crs.gov/reports/pdf/R40774>

² <http://legcounsel.house.gov/Comps/BUDGET.pdf>

³ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-debt-crisis-is-coming-soon-11553122139>

⁴ <https://republicans-budget.house.gov/budget-digest/reforming-budget-appropriations-process/>